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ABSTRACT

Many teen-agers readily identify with the family portrayed in "Cheaper by the Dozen" and, consequently, the novel is good supplementary reading for a unit on "The Family." A main objective of one class study of the novel was an analysis of Mr. Gilbreth's personality and his philosophy of life. Students noted his character traits and views in a notebook and compared them with ideal traits, their own views, and those of their parents. In a final activity designed to bridge the gap between the 1920's and the 1960's, they were asked to decide what they felt Mr. Gilbreth's reactions would be to works of art, photographs, popular and classical music, books, movies, clothing, food, and plays. The excitement, reasoning, and discussion generated among the seventh-graders indicated that the activity was successful and that Mr. Gilbreth was a character who lived for them. (LH)

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TEACHING CHEAPER BY THE DOZEN

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Cobwebs inhabit most young people's concept of the Victorian era. To make this period alive, Susan Jacoby and Richard Lavigne utilized an unusual book . . .

DAILY, students are surrounded not only by their own and neighboring families but also by a variety of mass media family groups running from the bizzare to the contrived. From the newspaper comics to nightly television; from the movies to modern novels; from monthly magazines to hit records; students hear time and again of family situations hardly akin to their own and fit only for the imagination.

Few books of a biographical nature are as delightful, whimsical, and motivating as *Cheaper By The Dozen.* (Bantam 45¢) The world of past generations is opened to the junior and senior high students who explore this book. Teenagers today, increasingly aware of their image, find it a refreshing experience to look at their parents' and grandparents' time. Perhaps they learn that teens and parents have changed little, though time has caused variations in the relationship. Students identify easily with the family of the book and even remark that they feel part of it. The book is well adapted to any unit on "The Family" and nicely supplements a unit of this nature provided by many anthologies. Used alone, the book provides interesting reading for bright and average junior high youngsters as well as for the average and slower senior high student. Its lively pace and sparkling humor keep interest high. Many students who are not keen about reading disappear with this book and read it in one sitting. The light humor and steady plot development make *Cheaper By The Dozen* a good addition to a secondary literature program.

When we began our study of the Family Unit, it was with the idea that the first family we studied be as close to live, real personalities as possible. The stereotypes of television, comics, and movies needed to be put in their place. Thus, *Cheaper By The Dozen* was perfect for our purposes.

The students were delighted with this humorous account and quickly took to the assigned task of analyzing character. Our main objective in the study of *Cheaper By The Dozen* was the analysis of Mr. Gilbreth's character. Students were to thoroughly familiarize themselves with his personality and his philosophy of life. Each received a notebook in which he carefully noted as many character traits as he could along with nightly reading assignments. The compilation of lists was stimulated through discussions of the character traits of the ideal father according to class judgment. Having made a list of ideal traits, they then compared it with the list they had gathered for Mr. Gilbreth. Imaginations were further stimulated by examining situations which Mr. Gilbreth handled. Essay assignments on "How Would You Have Handled It" brought out the students' views on Mr. Gilbreth's philosophy. In addition, students often compared similar home situations and the way they were handled by their own parents. The composing of a character trait list, however, had a more far-reaching significance.

The culminating activity for this section of the Family Unit involved an explicit knowledge of Mr. Gilbreth's character. Through discussion, reading, and essay writing, the students were expected to gain as thorough a knowledge of character as possible. In our final activity an attempt was made to bridge the gap between the 1920's and the 1960's and bring Mr. Gilbreth into the students' own world. Each was handed a sheet titled "In My Opinion" on which he would record what he felt to be Mr. Gilbreth's reaction to works of art, photographs, music (both classical and popular), books, movies, clothing, food, and plays. As each item for a particular topic was displayed, the students were to record on their worksheets which item they believed he would definitely like, possibly like, or probably find the all-time hate. Once a category had been completely displayed—all three items—and the class had had a chance to record their opinions, we quickly took a survey to see

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CHEAPER BY THE DOZEN

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how the class reacted. Then followed a discussion as to why students categorized things the way they did. The students had been reassured at the outset that we also would participate with definite opinions after the students' remarks were completed.

Perhaps it would be helpful if we looked at an example. The first category the class examined was art. The question posed was: If Mr. Gilbreth were to purchase a work of art for his home, which one would he definitely choose, possibly choose, never choose? Since one of us was an art instructor, we had three items (12" x 18") prepared to show the class. The first item displayed was an abstract watercolor; the second a well defined pen and ink Victorian line drawing; and the third a somewhat abstract Chinese type water color.

After allotting ample time for the class to examine the drawings, we asked for opinions. The entire class felt that Mr. Gilbreth would find the abstract watercolor the "all time hate." It would never hang in his house. Why? There were a variety of reasons. It was not well defined. Mr. Gilbreth might not be certain of its significance. Abstraction was not really popular at the time. The students saw only one reason which might have influenced his purchase of it. The picture was thought-provoking. Most saw the Chinese type watercolor a possibility because it was somewhat defined yet still left the imagination something to ponder. Its colors were more subdued and in keeping with Mr. Gilbreth's personality. The pen and ink sketch first displayed, caught their attention as the most likely for purchase. They noted the clean lines and conservativeness of the work. It was carefully defined and sturdy as well as being a product of Mr. Gilbreth's time. The work itself was the most orderly, efficient, and disciplined of the three.

From art we moved on to other carefully formulated situations. What photograph would Mr. Gilbreth most likely have taken: a brother and sister fighting, a small child gazing at a Christmas tree, or a boy pondering a graveyard? What classical music would he have chosen to hear: Johann Strauss, Claude Debussy, or Igor Stravinsky? What song from the "Top Twenty" would he have found most acceptable *Batman*, *Good Lovin'*, or *Elusive Butterfly?* What mode of dress would he have deemed least objectionable for his children in the 1960's: eye make-up, Courreges type dresses, or bell bottom pants for boys? What food would he most likely have served at home: beef stroganoff, game birds, or steak? What play would he have probably attended: *The Black Bags, You Can't Take It With You,* or *The Miracle Worker?* Which movie might he have taken the family to see: *Mary Poppins, Nobody Waved Good-by,* or *Juliet of the Spirits?* Which book might he have read: *Up the Down Staircase, PT 109,* or *The Loved One?* In each instance we presented the items or a synopsis of them to the class for examination and judgment.

If a classroom of excited seventh graders with hands wildly waving is any indication of success, then this activity was successful. Where disagreements as to placement of objects arose, there was imaginative reasoning and heated discussion. On many items, however, there was general agreement though reasoning often differed. There was unanimous agreement that Mr. Gilbreth was a character who lived for them. As one child aptly put it in an individualized reading assignment: "I hated to stop reading because I felt as though I were one of the Gilbreth children under Father's watchful eye."